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SuppFriends: Empowering Friends, Changing Culture

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WGSS 427 - Technology and Feminist Practice: Gender Violence Prevention Tools

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Critical Essay

Suppose a student is studying in their dorm and receives a text from a friend saying they need to talk about something. The student tells their friend they can come over. Shortly thereafter, the friend knocks on their door, and the student can tell that something is wrong. They sit together and their friend tells them that they were sexually assaulted last week by another person in their friend group, that they had said they were busy with exams as an excuse to miss their friend group dinners when really they could not bring themselves to be in a room with their perpetrator, and that they had skipped classes because they were afraid of running into their perpetrator on campus. While the student loves their friend and cares about them deeply, the student does not know what to say and wishes there was something they could do to help, but the truth is they just don't know what to say. They're not sure how to express their concern. After the friend leaves, the student finds themselves unable to sleep. They feel anger toward the perpetrator, powerlessness over the situation, and guilt for not having realized their friend had been suffering all week – and that they did not do anything to prevent the assault in the first place. Without the proper education, responding to disclosure of sexual assault can be an experience for which many people feel entirely unprepared to handle – no matter how much they care about and want to help their friends. SuppFriends seeks to empower members of the WashU community to respond supportively and effectively to peer disclosures, as well as to understand their own experiences and take care of themselves in the process.

While only a fraction of sexual assault survivors disclose their experiences to law enforcement or participate in the formalized university adjudication processes, two-thirds of survivors disclose the incidents to a friend (Ahrens et al., 2011). Survivors disclose most often to their friends, who consistently serve as the initial point of contact during the aftermath of an

assault. This initial disclosure is a crucial moment because it can either empower a survivor to seek further help and catalyze the healing process, or it can shut the survivor down, invalidate their feelings, and lead to higher rates of trauma and PTSD (Jacques-Tiura et al. 2010).

Unfortunately, because of widespread miseducation and the normalization of sexual violence, friends do not always know what constitutes sexual assault when a survivor discloses to them. Beyond the ability to initially recognize assaultive behaviors, many still do not have the training or knowledge to provide proper support. Upon hearing about a friend's experiences with sexual assault, an individual may experience secondary trauma, which can include guilt, sleeplessness, and anger ("Helping a Friend or Survivor"). Current sexual assault interventions in place at WashU do not adequately equip people supporting survivors to take care of themselves.

When developing SuppFriends, we foregrounded the idea that trauma is widespread, and that, in order to support survivors, we need to understand that any member of our community could be a survivor. In addition, widespread empathetic support of survivors plays a crucial role in cultivating a broader campus culture intolerant of sexual violence. DeCandia and Guarino (2015) describe a paradigmatic shift in the idea of trauma-informed care wherein "organizations and systems are seen as critical targets of trauma intervention" (13). Thus, it is crucial that SuppFriends goes beyond supporting survivors on individual and interpersonal levels and that survivor support becomes a community norm. Training a critical mass of members of the WashU community in supporting survivors will provide the human capital necessary to instigate community-wide change. Furthermore, the training will address not only how to support survivors in the context of individual disclosure, but also how to support survivors more broadly through addressing microaggressive language that blames survivors and normalizes sexual violence. While SuppFriends addresses the effects of sexual violence on multiple levels of the

socioecological model, the initial training focuses primarily on empowering peers to respond supportively within the moment of disclosure, a moment crucial to a survivor's future steps and course of healing.

In exploring what interventions already exist for the above stated problem, we searched for interventions that specifically addressed the issue of empowering friends of survivors, interventions that encompassed the idea of empowering friends of survivors within a larger context of prevention, education, and response, and interventions with infrastructures that could be adapted to address this issue. Below we look more closely at three of these specific interventions: one with robust infrastructure, one with exemplary trauma-informed content, and one in the pipeline that attempts to integrate these pieces. We argue that while existing resources do have specific pieces of the necessary intervention, there are no resources that currently integrate infrastructure, information, and trauma-informed principles.

A resource that has an incredibly robust infrastructure and provides users with agency and choice is an app called "Reach Out" created by Captivation, Inc.. Developed as a resource to anyone who needs access to prevention, care, or support, the app does not market itself directly toward friends of those who have experienced assault (Reach Out). As it is designed to serve as a means of both prevention and support, the app is meant to be downloaded and available before an assault takes place. The most basic version of the app, free to all users in the United States, centralizes reporting resources, therapeutic intervention, and campus-specific resources using a familiar and accessible icon-based dashboard format. Unfortunately, however, the information within the app is both factually inaccurate and biased toward formal reporting resources, and the rigid structure does not allow a university to customize the app based on its specific needs and characteristics. For example, the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention (RSVP) Center at

Washington University is not listed as a confidential resource on the Washington University specific page, and the Title IX office is framed as a support resource. Thus, while the intervention's infrastructure encourages preemptive engagement, the information within it needs improvement.

A model for empowering students to support survivors is Emory University's Sexual Assault Peer Advocates (SAPA) program. Members of the Emory community can sign up for a two-hour in-person SAPA training and complete a follow-up interview to become SAPA certified. The training focuses on sexual assault myths and facts, resources within the university and surrounding community, policies, and as well as basics on survivor care and response. In addition to providing information on how to support survivors upon disclosure, SAPA extends the idea of a survivor safety and support to university culture and equips participants with the tools "to respond to instances of victim-blaming and the degradation of women in a non-aggressive, educational, and compassionate manner" ("Sexual Assault Peer Advocates," 2017). As a study has found that those who possess "callous sexual attitudes" believe using force to obtain intercourse falls outside the scope of rape, addressing these attitudes is crucial to creating a campus truly committed to supporting survivors as well as to preventing further sexual violence (Edwards, Bradshaw, & Hinsz, 2014). Out of a desire to keep the training short such that people will complete it, the current intervention focuses primarily on empowering people to respond to disclosures. In the future, we will develop trainings that will give users the opportunity to practice identifying and responding to comments reflecting callous sexual attitudes, and thus intervene on a primary level of assault prevention. Furthermore, Emory University's strategy of marketing SAPA as a means to creating a "survivor supportive campus"

could be useful in the promotion of SuppFriends as a tool that improves the university environment.

A resource that contains good information but is lacking in infrastructure is Washington University's RSVP Center's webpage entitled "Helping a Friend or Survivor" (Washington University RSVP Center). The page skillfully includes both "friend" and "survivor" in the title, which means that an individual who did not appraise a friend's experiences as those of a survivor, but still associated those experiences with sexual violence, might seek help on this page. The webpage includes information regarding what not to do (e.g., make decisions for the survivor), as well as what to do (e.g., validate the survivor's feelings and experiences). The webpage also includes information on secondary trauma and the emotions one may experience upon hearing of another person's assault. The webpage encourages readers to reach out to the RSVP Center or Student Health Services should they need psychological support, but does not list any resources to which an individual could direct survivors. Presumably, if one were to look on the survivor information page, they could find resources and options for survivors to share with their friend, but they would have to go out of their way to do so. Furthermore, because people do not generally peruse the RSVP website in their spare time, it is unlikely that an individual would seek out this information preemptively – and would likely only seek out the information after they found themselves in a situation where they could have employed it. As the response a survivor receives upon initial disclosure is crucial, it is imperative that people know how to provide support before that disclosure occurs. Many universities, and virtually every organization designed to support survivors of sexual assault, have a similar webpage. However, none of these webpages are interactive and they do not provide individuals with the opportunity to practice or rehearse what they would do in the event a survivor disclosed to them. As proven

by extensive research on bystander intervention programs on university campuses, interactive trainings that include skill building greatly improve retention of information and likelihood of action (Ahrens et. al, 2011; Coker et. al., 2011)

Another project designed to empower people to help survivors that is in the pipeline is a Rape Crisis Counseling app (Calhoun, 2017). The app is designed to train people as advocates who can accompany survivors during hospital visits. Generally, this type of training is only offered by Rape Crisis Centers, and is thus unavailable to those without an accessible RCC or those whose cannot attend regularly scheduled training sessions. With this app, people can undergo training without specific space and time constraints. Furthermore, this tool gives people the skills they need before they need them, as people take it upon themselves complete the training such that they will be prepared the next time they encounter a survivor in need of an advocate. While advocacy in healthcare contexts is necessary, this model could be expanded to provide training on how to support survivors more generally.

Currently available resources address many necessary elements of empowering peers to support survivors, as they provide adequate information regarding how to talk to survivors, how to deal with secondary trauma, the resources available to both survivors and to those supporting survivors, and how to connect survivors to resources. However, the available resources largely operate within a post hoc paradigm. We will keep the comprehensive information and inclusive language available on the Washington University RSVP Center website, imitate the robust infrastructure of “Reach Out,” and, like the Rape Crisis Counseling app, and provide comprehensive education on how to provide appropriate support within a specific situation. When incorporating these elements into our intervention, we will ensure the information is both accurate and accessible, as well as design the intervention in such a way that people will engage

with the information before they need to put it to use. In blending together the positive elements of existing resources and addressing their shortcomings, we seek to innovatively address this problem that, while urgent, so many interventions do not effectively confront. Essentially, what we hope to accomplish in the development of SuppFriends is a SAPA-style training that integrates information from the RSVP website regarding campus resources and supporting survivors. This training portion of the app will operate similarly to the Rape Crisis Counseling app, and the information regarding resources will adopt a similar infrastructure to “Reach Out.”

We believe an app (and accompanying website) is the best format for our intervention, as it allows individuals to access training on their own time and in a space that is comfortable and safe for them. Unlike an in-person training, having information stored within an app allows users to reference the information as needed – and also give users the opportunity to go through the training again to refresh themselves on the information. As the university requires students to complete many trainings upon matriculation, students often forget the information presented to them within trainings. As students begin their university experience and realize that they may one day need to apply the information within SuppFriends, the format of the training allows students to return to it and access the information within it whenever they wish and even complete the modules again.

Structure of SuppFriends

Specifically, SuppFriends will provide training on how to respond to disclosures, practice scenarios wherein people can put their active listening skills to the test, information on campus- and region-specific resources, and information on secondary trauma and self-care. In the development of the app, we aimed to foreground trauma-informed practice, accessibility, and intersectionality. Students will initially access the app after they complete Think About It, a

training module on sexual assault which all first-year students are required to complete prior to orientation. Because SuppFriends will complement WashU's existing sexual assault curriculum, the app will divide the training into three modules and focus primarily on survivor care and response. At the beginning of the academic year, students will complete the first set of trainings. These trainings will cover the following topics: (1) how to respond to disclosure, (2) exercises in which users identify the positive and negative elements of different responses to disclosure, (3) how to navigate the app and the resources within it. The second set of trainings, to be completed in January of the first year, will coincide with the follow-up program to "The Date", "Rewind Blurred Lines" and focus on expanding disclosure responses to specific social scenarios. Students will complete the third set of trainings January of their sophomore year alongside "Stand By Me" and will specifically focus on responding to disclosures of intimate partner violence. Below, we describe the content of the first training and resource page and review the main considerations that informed our content development.

Responding to Disclosure

SuppFriends has an entire section, titled "What Do I Say" dedicated to providing extensive information on how best to respond to peer disclosures of sexual assault or other forms of interpersonal violence. The text on this page broadly addresses feelings that survivors may experience, sample phrases and responses, and broad guidelines for how to react and proceed in the event of a disclosure. This page also links in-depth pages outlining effective methods for active listening and basic "dos and don'ts" of responding to disclosures. The hierarchical nature of the page ensures that users quickly have access to the most pertinent information and have the option to explore further if necessary. The initial training that users complete when first

downloading the app ensures that they have knowledge of the page location and contents for reference at any point after they complete the training scenarios.

Practice Scenarios

While a disclaimer will preface each scenario saying that sexual violence can take many different forms and that users should not expect others' experiences will resemble the one depicted, the presentation of scenarios inevitably carries with it the implicit message that sexual violence fits into a box. For example, many survivors do not characterize their experiences as serious enough to report as a result of narrow societal tropes of what constitutes assault (Zinzow & Thompson, 2011). We want to avoid a situation wherein someone who completed the training invalidates a survivor's experiences because those experiences differ greatly from those depicted within the training. To foreground both intersectionality of identities and diversity of experiences, the practice scenarios will encompass a wide variety of experiences. These will include scenarios depicting different social structures, cultural practices and identities, gender identities, sexualities, races, and ethnicities with a specific focus on highlighting the intersections between and among these identities and experiences. By using a wide variety of example scenarios, we explicitly combat the exclusivity of mainstream narratives of sexual assault.

In addition to the content of the scenarios, the format in which users practice their skills can also impact their understanding of what will happen upon responding to disclosure. A multiple choice format in which there is one "right" answer and several "wrong" answers might promote the idea that there is one "right" way to respond to disclosure – or that there is a formula for what to say that will always elicit a positive response. SuppFriends will therefore employ a format that does not fall into this framework. While further usability interviews and piloting will determine an ideal framework, an idea we have for initial piloting is giving people the

opportunity to evaluate hypothetical responses. For example, they might determine which of two responses is better and have the opportunity to explain what about one response made it better than the other as well. The explanation part may take the form of users typing their answers in a short free response block and then receiving an explanation with which to compare their response. Throughout usability testing and piloting rounds, should survivors find this methodology problematic, we will amend the format accordingly.

Guidance Through the Reporting Process

The reporting page will explain the different reporting pathways available to survivors (i.e., RSVP Center anonymous report, Title IX, criminal legal system), should they wish to pursue a formal report. For each pathway, the page provides a general overview of the process and what types of consequences may result for perpetrators. The pages include information on the role friends can have in the process. We will also stress that students do not need to report an assault if they wish to move housing or classes.

Resources

Resources will be divided into campus- and region-specific pages. Each resource will have a “more information” page, which will explain the type of assistance offered by that resource (e.g., counseling, accommodations, etc.), whether people can call on behalf of a friend, what people should expect when they access the resource, and a link to the resource’s website. Following the presentation of information, the app will embed a link to accessing the resource. Our hopes are that people will read the information such that they can decide whether they wish to utilize that resource; we wish to equip users to provide survivors with information rather than directives, such that survivors maintain agency over the course of the healing process. We will

emphasize that some resources may work for some people and not for others, and that the resources listed are not the only ones available.

Framework for Accountability

Having a critical mass of our campus community trained in supporting survivors is creating a survivor supportive campus. However, we also acknowledge that as the content of SuppFriends revolves heavily around experiences of sexual violence, the training may be triggering for survivors.

In order to balance the needs of survivors with the promotion of widespread adoption, SuppFriends will operate under a framework of “soft accountability.” Upon opening the SuppFriends interface within the WUSTL app – or through the SuppFriends webpage – and watching the “How to Use SuppFriends” instructional video, students will receive a unique token code they will submit to a university-system based database to receive credit for completion. In addition to instructing users on how to navigate the app, the video will talk about the importance of the training in the context of making the WashU community one that is committed to supporting survivors. While this system means users need only watch the introductory video to receive completion credit, we hope that getting people to engage with the app and learn about why the importance of knowing how to support survivors will encourage them to complete the trainings. In order to encourage widespread completion of the training, we will complement this soft accountability framework with a social norming strategy, somewhat similar to that employed by “Green Dot.” However, we will be sure to frame this strategy in a sensitive way, such that we are not inadvertently providing people with the opportunity to gain social capital from having the skills to support survivors – thus belittling survivors’ experiences. Rather, the social norming for SuppFriends will focus on making WashU a campus truly committed to supporting survivors by

becoming knowledgeable about how to support survivors. We will gauge the effectiveness of this strategy, and determine, to the best of our abilities, whether there were perhaps reasons people did not complete the training aside from it being triggering.

When Will SuppFriends Be Completed?: Never.

The nature of projects in the digital humanities runs counter to the idea of generating a finished product (Brown et al., 2009). Thus, we see the development of SuppFriends as a continuous process, cyclical rather than linear, constantly taking feedback and changes in the environment in which we operate into account. As mobile applications require constant maintenance and adjustments to software updates, and as the information within the app as well as best practices evolve, we will need to release periodic edition-based updates to the app. A complete timeline for the first three years of development, piloting, and launching is included in the Appendix.

Crucial to working to end sexual violence on college campuses is making a commitment to support survivors in our community. We believe SuppFriends plays a crucial role in solidifying this commitment, as it equips members of our community to respond empathetically and effectively to peer disclosures and facilitates widespread knowledge of the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and community consequences of sexual assault. We hope that with training from SuppFriends, instead of not knowing what to do or say, the student in the introductory scenario will competently and empathetically respond to their friend's disclosure. Rather than sit stunned in silence and sleeplessly mull over their lack of reaction, the student will immediately thank their friend for sharing, and tell them they believe and support them. The student will mirror their friends' language, outline available support services, and offer to accompany them to any resources they might want to access. The student will understand their own reaction to the

disclosure as secondary trauma, and know when and how to seek resources on their own behalf.

Most importantly, this won't just be one student; it will be the entire community.

Usability Statement

Due the early stage in our intervention development process, and lack of a working prototype, we decided to have more casual conversations about the usability of our intervention using the proposal PowerPoint we created as a guide for the conversations. Most importantly, these conversations reinforced the role of the user as the expert in the app creation process (Bhatia, 2015). Usability interviews have been paramount in ensuring that our intervention is truly centered in, and will operate effectively for university students. These conversations, along with feedback from our panel of experts during the proposal presentations informed the construction and implementation of the intervention moving forward. Based on previous experiences working through usability issues, conducting usability testing, relevant readings, and usability conversations, our greatest challenges to implementation will be ensuring that the app doesn't dictate what assault should or does look like, balancing the amount and accessibility of information, making the app truly trauma-informed, and ensuring responsible implementation and community adoption.

1. SuppFriends cannot and should not dictate what assault looks like.

SuppFriends will broadly describe scenarios involving sexual assault, which could – albeit unintentionally – contribute to the narrative that depictions of sexual assault shown by authoritative sources are valid, and other experiences are not. As both the panel of experts during the proposal presentations and the usability interviewees mentioned this concern, the training scenarios within our intervention must not reinforce this idea. Based on our usability discussions, we have decided to implement screens before and after each training scenario and on all informational pages reiterating the idea that all experiences of assault are different. These disclaimers explicitly state that our scenarios do not encompass all experiences of sexual assault

or intimate partner violence. Additionally, at the suggestion of usability interviewees, we will depict numerous scenarios with a wide range of identities and experiences. While not entirely free of problems, if supplemented with the above warnings, a broad array of scenarios could help to implicitly combat narrow conceptualizations of what constitutes gender-based violence.

2. SuppFriends must carefully balance the need to provide thorough information with the need for brevity.

While people who specifically study gender-based violence may spend hours reading through and understanding all of the nuances of peer disclosures, most people would be overwhelmed by extensive amounts of information. With this in mind, we edited the app pages in order to succinctly convey the most important information. The text-based sections of the app list the most important information first and embed more detailed information in subsequent pages for people to explore further if they so choose. By adding in category groupings for the resource and training pages, the app more efficiently directs users to situations and resources of particular interest, rather than making users search through the entire app to find what they need.

3. SuppFriends must be truly trauma informed.

This might be the most important issue that came up during usability conversations – and one of the most difficult issues to address. During our proposal presentation and usability conversations, invited guests and interviewees brought up a number of potentially triggering or harmful scenarios we had not previously considered. Others brought up scenarios where both the person being disclosed to and the person disclosing are survivors, scenarios where people may not recognize what happened to them as assault, scenarios where someone identifies as a survivor but the training scenarios do not reflect their experience, and more. While our planning process focused primarily on the balance between mandatory training and survivor safety, we

must address these additional issues in further development. We have an obligation to survivors to ensure that this app will not cause any additional harm, and unfortunately that is not as simple as having an escape button.

4. We must ensure that SuppFriends is adopted and integrated into communities in a responsible manner.

While we consider the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of SuppFriends paramount, the implementation of this intervention also has the potential to impact the way that we treat survivors on a community level. We originally devised an adoption strategy similar to that of many campus programs, with widespread advertising including stickers, sponsorships, and posters. Both our usability interviewees and the panel of experts found this adoption strategy problematic. They worry that having such conspicuous publicity for this campaign will taint its true purpose. While playing to people's desires to conspicuously display their altruistic character can spread the word, it may very well come off as callous to survivors in our community who do not feel supported by those whose laptops and water bottles bear the stickers. Does a laptop sticker with the app logo indicate a person who can thoughtfully receive a disclosure, or someone who randomly took a sticker from a table in the student union? How can we ensure that perpetrators do not participate in social media campaigns or PR events? Our usability interviewees suggest that more targeted and less conspicuous advertising in combination with the mandatory (soft accountability) trainings would better facilitate widespread recognition and adoption without trivializing anyone's experiences or making survivors uncomfortable. One of our usability interviewees pointed out that targeted implementation focused during the orientation period for each incoming class year would create the potential for widespread adoption and normalization within approximately four years of the initial introduction.

SuppFriends: Accessibility Statement

When beginning our development process, we placed significant emphasis on accessibility in the planning and building of SuppFriends. Central to our development, accessible features are a primary rather than secondary consideration. We recognize that accessibility encompasses both meeting the needs of differently abled individuals as well as ensuring that populations who may need other types of accommodations can use the app.

First, our entire interface will allow users to pan and zoom in order to address the needs of those with visual impairment. Additionally, SuppFriends will have easily alterable app settings that allow the user to change the default scale of all text and images within the app. This same functionality will ensure that when the user changes size of text and images, the app will reconfigure accordingly to ensure that the interface remains easily navigable. We will also ensure fonts and color contrast are designed for clear reading and are visually comprehensible to those who have any form of color blindness (Schneiderman, 2009). Similarly, all audio content will be recorded clearly, and closed captioning will be available for all users. While these are basic built-in features that will make our app inherently more usable for differently abled users, there is a whole field of technological practice and extensive documentation related to more broadly applicable usability solutions (see Williams, 2012; “Making Apps More Accessible;” “Accessibility Programming Guide for iOS,” 2012).

One means to enhancing the accessibility of SuppFriends for visually impaired users is to supplement it with VoiceOver, an app that reads aloud options on a screen. This solution, however, can only work when the app and/or back-end coding processes provide text and documentation that can be read by the VoiceOver program. There are similar solutions that directly address other differently abled populations as well. We will ensure that the back-end

coding of the app provides not only basic “readability” but also captures the nuance and specificity with which we have constructed the interface. In this vein, we will specifically focus on testing and improving the seamless integration of SuppFriends with accessibility enhancement technologies. While we would like to similarly ensure that the app is “readable” for technologies that translate languages, technological translation does not always adequately capture more complex ideas presented. We would like to provide specific individual translations for as many commonly spoken languages as possible. In these translations, we will consult trauma-informed individuals fluent in the target languages to incorporate culturally appropriate and sensitive terminology rather than literal translation of text and audio.

We understand that disabilities can take many different forms, and that members of any university community may have cognitive as well as physical disabilities. For example, we will not place any time limits on responses in order to ensure sufficient reading and processing time for each user. More broadly, the lack of time limits throughout the app enables users to absorb information in the order and at the pace they feel most comfortable. While important, the absence of timed sections does not ensure accessibility for the broader spectrum of cognitive and developmental disabilities that may affect our users. To determine how best to adapt SuppFriends so as to best serve these populations, we will consult Christina Meneses, who designs and facilitates trainings specifically for adults with special needs at the St. Louis YWCA.

Lastly, as not all university community members have smartphones and have the ability to download and use a smartphone app, the content within the application will also be available in a web-based format that employs the same accessible and trauma-informed features as the mobile version.

SuppFriends: Trauma Audit

In creating a technological intervention in the field of gender-based violence, we recognize the particular need to foreground and effectively integrate trauma informed practice. Broadly speaking, we looked to ground our app in trauma informed and survivor-centered principles (Zinzow & Thompson, 2011). We started each conversation, each ideation session, and each presentation with a discussion of the impact of trauma – and the idea that trauma is a widespread experience. As the 2015 *Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct* revealed that over 20% of female students and 7% of male students at Washington University in St. Louis have experienced non-consensual sexual contact, we understand that survivors will interact with our app, and that this is a definitive reality rather than a likely possibility (Cantor et al., 2015; DeCandia & Guarino, 2015). Beyond that, we recognize the seriousness that secondary trauma poses in the situations our trainings address. We intentionally integrate trauma informed principles throughout the construction of each of the individual components of the app. Below we those principles and discuss them applied both generally and to each of the six main sections of SuppFriends.

App Interface and Design

We equipped all pages of the app with an escape button to ensure that any user can exit the app when necessary for the sake of their physical and emotional safety. We designed the logo and name of the app to appear inconspicuous on a smartphone screen, which will minimize potential suspicion from invasive partners and facilitate privacy and confidentiality. To reduce the potential for user retraumatization, we attempted to avoid overly graphic or triggering language and scenarios throughout the entire app design process. More broadly, we frame the app as providing options and guidance, rather than giving explicit explanation of every possible

scenario. Our community and university adoption plans emphasize the use of SuppFriends as a “trauma informed toolkit” rather than an exhaustive set of instructions for handling peer disclosures of sexual assault and other forms of interpersonal violence.

Training

The training portion of the app may have been one of the most difficult to make trauma informed, and we are in ongoing discussions to ensure that our training embodies a trauma informed user experience. The most significant issue we face in regards to ensuring this section is trauma informed is accountability. In order to ensure widespread utilization of SuppFriends, we recommend it as a mandatory training for all incoming students. However, we want to avoid mandating a potentially trauma-inducing training for survivors within the incoming class of students. We are therefore working to develop a “soft-accountability framework” that will encourage completion of training for all students while still ensuring that survivors have the ability to step away if necessary. While we have discussed this broad framework for soft accountability at length, we are in continued discussions with campus and issue experts on how to practically institute this idea.

“What Do I Say?”

This section instructs peers on how to approach and respond to disclosures of sexual assault in a trauma-informed manner. This includes instructions on how to mirror the language a survivor uses when describing their experiences, how to frame questions in order to avoid overt or implied victim blaming, and discussion of the need to ensure survivor autonomy.

Resources

Rather than taking descriptions of resources from webpages, we will work with developers to create these descriptions. This ensures that resource information pages will include

realistic information about the uses and limitations of each resource rather than displaying an organization-generated description that is often overly broad, distorts the scope of resources the organization provides, and overlooks obvious flaws.

Guidance Through the Reporting Process

We developed this section in response to the many misconceptions about the reporting process and misinformation about reporting resources. It specifically addresses the realities of the reporting process, and highlights and addresses commonly held misconceptions in order to ensure that there is complete transparency in the process and limitations of each reporting option. Additionally, the reporting options are ordered to contradict the explicit privileging of formal reporting structures found within many university informational documents.

“What About Me?”

This section of the app highlights the issue of secondary trauma. Many people do not know what secondary trauma is, and many more still do not believe that they have a right to experience it. By dedicating a page of the app exclusively to secondary trauma, we want to both ensure that people have all of the resources they need when experiencing the effects of supporting survivors, and emphasize that self-care is an essential part of dealing with peer disclosures of assault.

Practice

The practice section seeks to combat the idea that trauma and sexual violence always appear in a particular form. By representing different identities and scenarios – and prefacing these scenarios with a statement that they do not embody all cases of sexual violence – we hope to broaden users’ perceptions of what assault, trauma, and disclosure look like.

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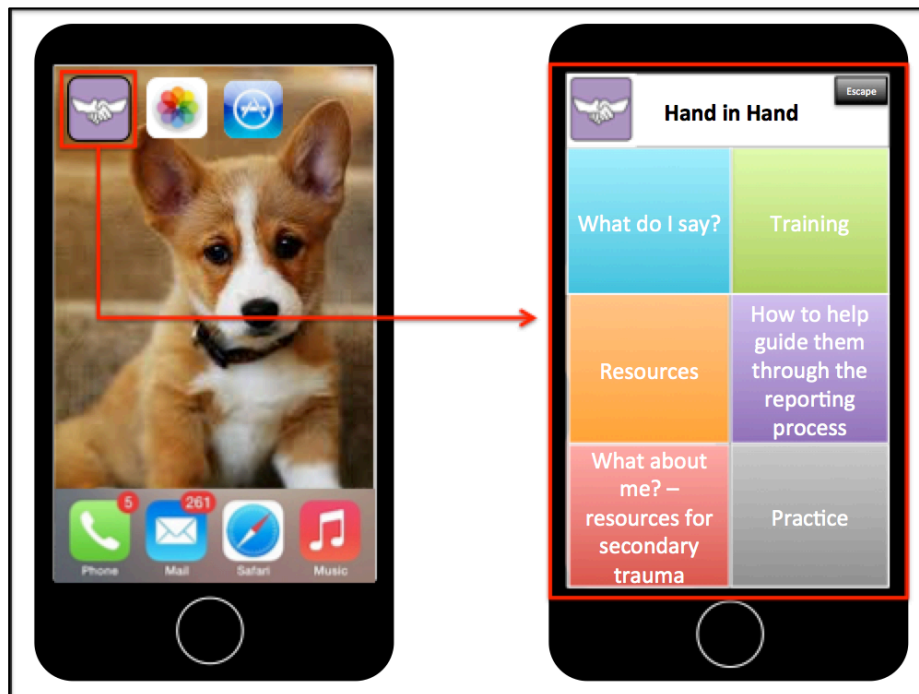
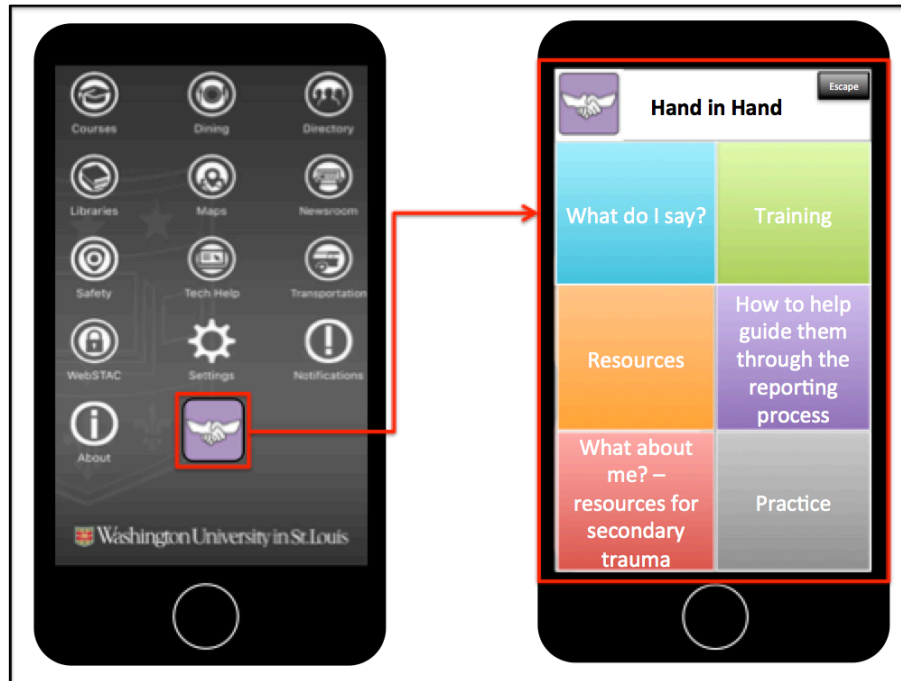
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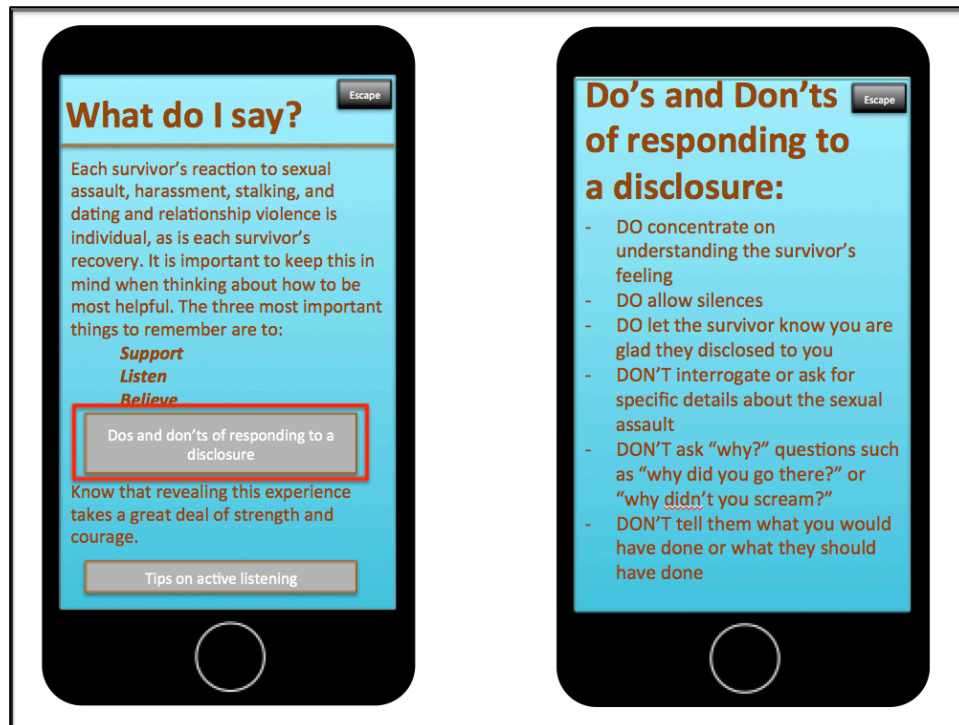
Appendix

App Snapshots: This section shows screenshots depicting what each broad section of the app will look like. SuppFriends will either be housed in the WUSTL app or as a stand-alone app, so we depict both scenarios below.

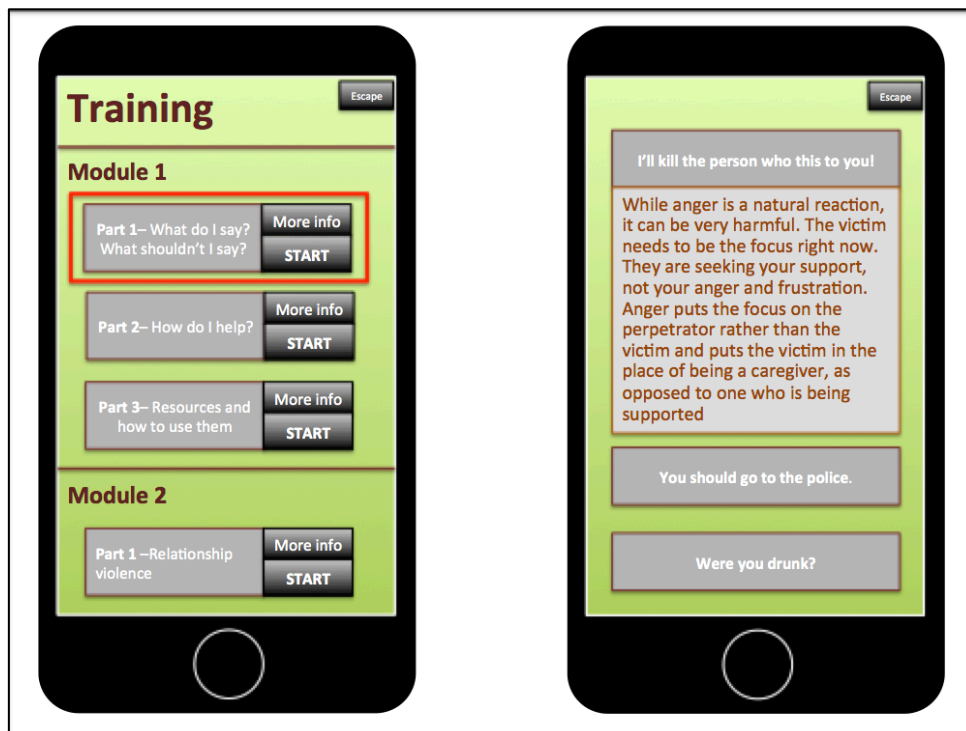


SupFriends includes six distinct sections titled:

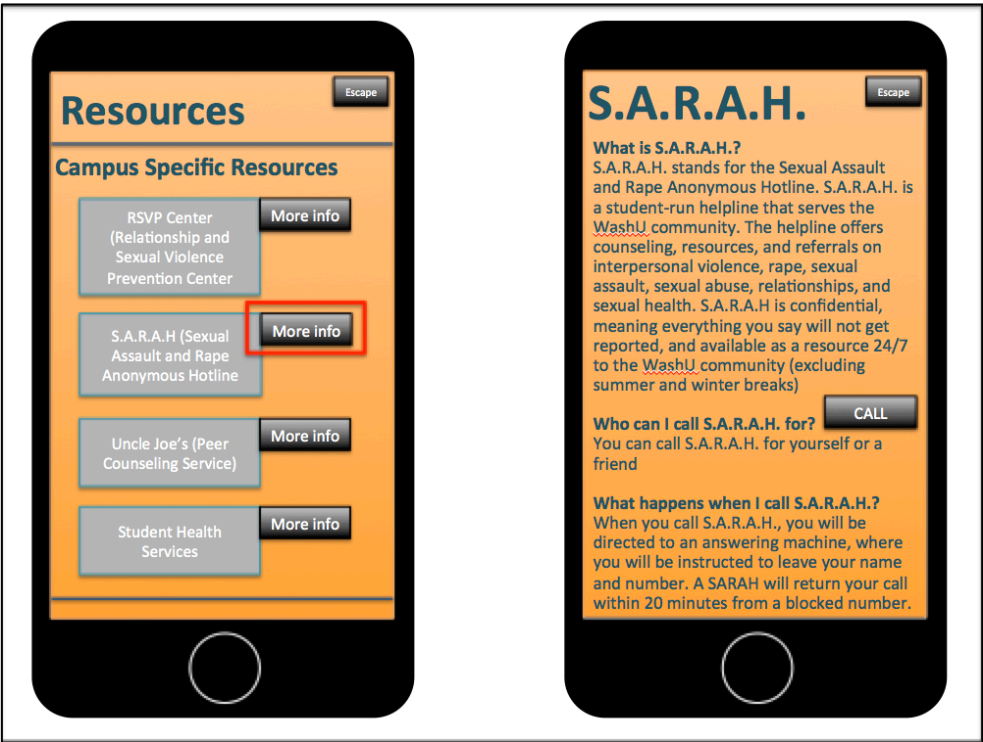
1. What do I say?



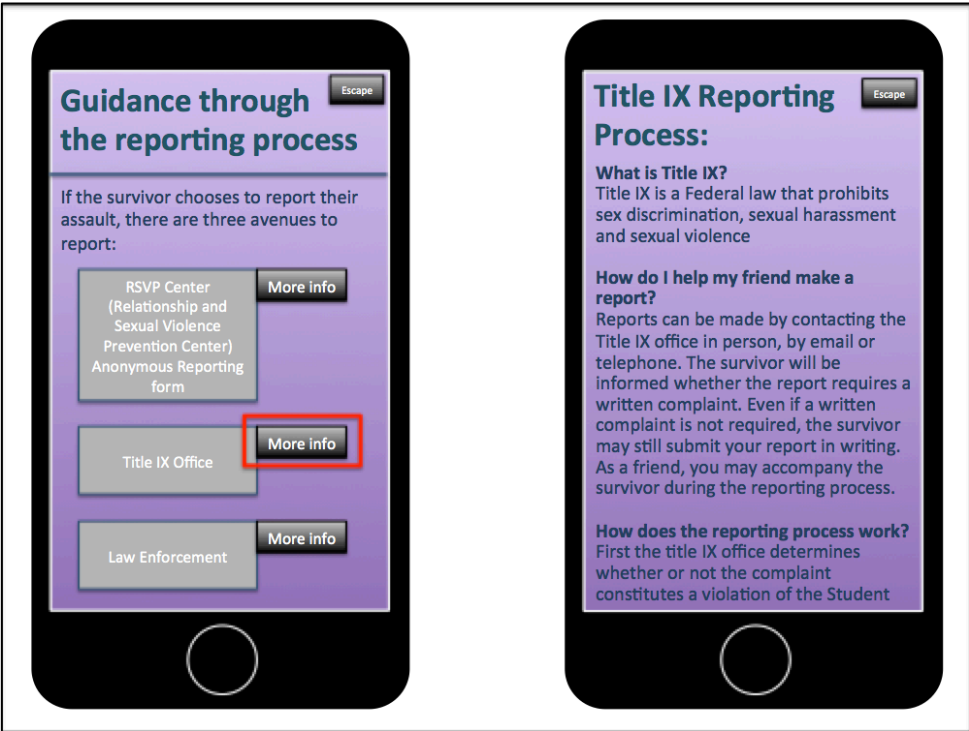
2. Training



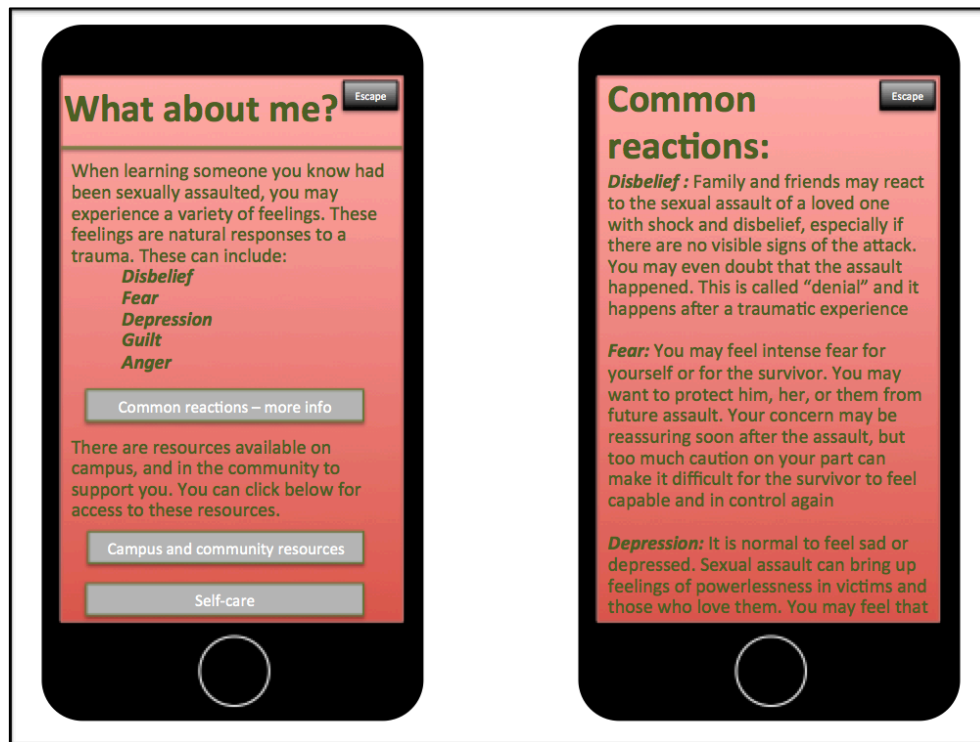
3. Resources



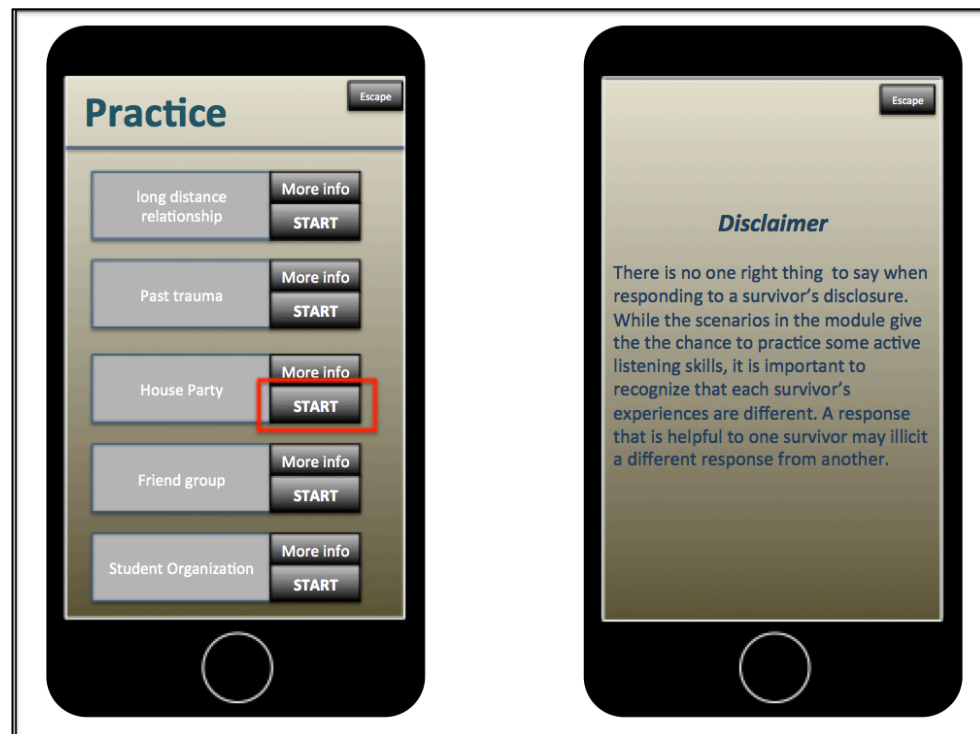
4. Guidance through the reporting process



5. What about me?



6. Practice



Plan For World Domination:

Building the intervention – (December 2017-May 2018)

First, and most practically, we will have to ensure we develop the app with all of its proposed functionalities. This will either require us to get help from friends who have the requisite programming skills and design/animation skills and are willing to assist out of the goodness of their hearts/for a resume boost/class credit, or hiring an organization that can code and design this app. My inclination is that we would be better off working through our own (low cost) personal networks, as we have no funding or institutional buy-in for the intervention currently. An added benefit of this strategy would be the ability to have more control and involvement in the creation process. We would be able to ensure the integrity of our vision, including ensuring institution of trauma informed principles and survivor-centered advocacy.

Usability – (March 2018 – May 2018)

It is essential to present institutional partners with the best form of the intervention. Comprehensive usability testing will fix any glaring problems and ensure the app is intuitive, thorough, and provides clear messaging and direction. We will conduct a series of usability tests with a diverse array of students, considering factors such as race, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, geographic origin, and more in order to ensure that our intervention adopts a margins-to-center approach. In usability tests, we will also test accessibility, ensuring that our intervention works with supplementary software made to assist differently abled individuals, and that the base app is also as accessible as possible. This includes app features such as large print and contrasting color, and functionalities aimed at protecting users from possible trauma due to the subject material of the app including, but not limited to, escape buttons and content and trigger warnings.

I see both the building of the app and usability testing as a cyclical process, as there will be multiple rounds of testing to continuously improve the functionality of the app.

Pilot Buy-in – (May 2018 – July 2018)

In order to ensure use for SuppFriends's intended purpose – as a mandatory part of the extended freshmen orientation at WashU – we will need to convince administrators of its importance, and present them with a completed product for either a stand-alone app, or integration into the WUSTL app. We would first need to discuss with representatives of the RSVP Center, as well as other involved campus entities to gain their buy-in, and then leverage these partners to help convince upper-level administrators of the intervention's importance. Because the intervention will have been built out and tested by this point, the university will not need to financially invest to do so. Also, another avenue that could be useful to look into is the RSV-AI, which aims to assess sexual assault and relationship violence on campus and explore ways to address it. Collaborating with the RSV-AI on a pilot program of this intervention would

allow the RSV-AI to gain valuable data, and would give us institutional support and technical assistance.

Pilot – (August 2018 – May 2019)

Once we convince university officials of the necessity of the app, we would run a one-year pilot that includes usage of the app and training, and administers surveys periodically throughout the year to gain an understanding of what students think, how often they use the app, and how it changes their conversations surrounding sexual assault/disclosures of sexual assault. We would then be able to use the pilot results and data to improve the functionalities of the app and see whether or not it effectively serves its purpose. Students would download the app and complete the initial mandatory training before fall orientation, and the second (shorter) mandatory training before the beginning of the spring semester. The mandatory trainings are timed to coincide with “The Date” and “Rewind Blurred Lines.” We will administer assessments periodically throughout this timeframe.

Scale-up – (May 2019 – December 2020 and beyond!)

We would (hopefully) use this pilot to secure funding to continuously improve the app, and conduct research/make it flexible enough to apply at different universities using the same ground-up approach that we would use at WashU. This would be grounded in strategies to ensure input from both officials and students at the universities that wish to implement the app. We will hopefully be in direct contact with the RSVP-like centers at different campuses, and seek input from students and involved student organizations on these campuses. We would spend the first year after the pilot working specifically on building out these new functionalities with partnering campuses, and simultaneously create a non-university affiliated version of the app for schools that do not choose to participate. While it would be ideal to have the app as part of university programming, this is most assuredly not a reality, and it is still important to ensure that people can access the app even if their university is not participating. After this one-year period, the app would be launched within universities across the country.

Maintenance – (Continuously throughout the life of the app, major focus post 2020)

As with all technological interventions, we must continually update SuppFriends to address compatibility with new software updates as well as new information regarding the ever-changing landscape of gender violence research and resources. Similar to most smartphone apps, we will launch new updates of the app either every year, or when major changes occur. Old versions of the app will remain operational, but we will integrate updates within the iOS and android systems so that users receive update notifications on their smartphones. We will automatically update the web-based version of the intervention, which will keep it current, and allow us to use it as a universal source of truth for SuppFriends.

Environmental Scan Resources: This is a list of other interventions that we looked at in depth while developing SuppFriends.

1. Washington University RSVP Center Website: “Helping a Friend or Survivor”

<https://rsvpcenter.wustl.edu/get-help/helping-a-friend-or-survivor/>

A webpage that discusses how to help survivors of sexual assault that is part of the larger website for the Washington University Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center.

2. Captivation, Inc.: “Reach Out”

<https://www.captivation.com/>

An Apple and Android app that provides resources for sexual assault on university campuses. The app is specific to each campus, and can be integrated with existing university prevention and education systems for an additional fee.

3. Code Innovation (in concert with other organizations): Rape Crisis Counseling

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/rape-crisis-counseling-app-health#/>

Currently in the pipeline. This app aims to integrate rape crisis counseling to train and empower informal rape crisis counselors and make this information more accessible and available across a variety of contexts.

4. Students at Oxford University: First Response

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2015-10-15-oxford-students-launch-new-app-supporting-sexual-assault-survivors>

NOTE: not able to download in the U.S. (trust us, we tried).

This app aims to empower friends of survivors by taking them through the relevant information for medical care and calling the police.

5. University of Michigan: Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC)

<https://sapac.umich.edu/>

University of Michigan’s SAPAC website, like the Washington University RSVP Center website includes a page that addresses friends of survivors. Also, this is a great example of a comprehensive university sponsored website.

6. Harvard University Students: “Through the Eyes of a Survivor”

<https://hathix.github.io/through-the-eyes-of-a-survivor/>

This is a data visualization created as a class project for a Harvard University data visualization class. It integrates personal narratives of survivors with broad data on university sexual assault.

7. Carnegie Mellon Students: “Decisions that Matter”

<http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/course/53-610/>

This is a “gamified” sexual assault website that allows for a narrative exploration of issues of sexual assault. It is intended for both university orientation programs and continuing education

8. Emory University: Sexual Assault Peer Advocates (SAPA)

<http://sapa.emorylife.org/>

A program that requires a two-hour in-person training covering response to disclosures, resources available on and around campus, and information on how to call out microaggressive statements that contribute to a problematic campus climate